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CURIOUS "LETTER" CREDITED TO CHRIST

Country papers throughout the Southwest are printing, usually at the request of subscribers, what purports to be a letter written by Christ. This is a revival of a well-known "fad" of fifteen years ago. In this letter was an injunction that it be "published" to the world by whoever found it, together with the statement that misfortune and bad luck would follow the person having possession of it in the event that it was not given publicly.

There is likewise a promise that whoever may have a copy of this letter in his or her possession will prosper and be followed by good fortune. The promise and the prediction seem to have had such effect on so many persons that the spread of this letter bids fair to equal that of the famous "chain prayer" which swept over this country and England a few years ago.

According to the story, or legend, the original letter was found some time in the early days of Christianity by a child. Here is the letter, or command, as it appears in the publications: "Whoever works on the Sabbath day shall be cursed. I command you to go to church and keep holy the Lord's Day without any manner of work. You shall not idle or misspend your time in bedecking yourselves in superfluities of costly apparel and vain dressing, for I have ordered it a day of rest. I will have that day kept holy that your sins may be forgiven you."

"You will not break my commandments, but observe and keep them, they being written by my hand and spoken by my mouth. You shall not only go to church yourselves, but also your man-servant and maid-servant. Observe my words and learn my commandments."

"You shall finish your work every Saturday at 6 o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour the preparation for the Sabbath begins. I advise you to fast five Fridays in the year, beginning on Good Friday and continuing

the Fridays following in remembrance of the five bloody wounds I received for you and mankind.

"You shall love one another and cause them that are not baptized to come to church and receive the holy sacrament—that is to say, baptism and then the supper of the Lord, and be made a member thereof, and in so doing I will give you long life and many blessings. Your land shall be replenished and bring forth abundance, and I will comfort you in the greatest temptation, and surely he that doeth to the contrary shall be cursed."

"I will also send hardness of heart on them, and especially on hardened and unrepentant unbelievers. He that hath given to the poor shall find it profitable. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day, for the seventh day I have taken as a resting day to myself."

"And he that hath a copy of this letter, written by my own hand and spoken from my own mouth, and keepeth it, without publishing it to others, shall not prosper, but he that publisheth it to others shall be blessed by me, and if their sins be as many as the stars at night, and if they truly believe they shall be pardoned, and they that believe not this writing, and my commandments will have my plagues upon you, and you will be consumed with your children, goods, cattle and all other worldly enjoyments that I have given you. Do but once think of what I have suffered for you—if you do, it will be well for you in this world and in the world which is to come."

"Whoever shall have a copy of this letter and keep it in their house, nothing shall hurt them; neither pestilence, lightning or thunder; and if any woman be in birth and put her trust in me she shall be delivered of her child. You shall hear no more news of me except through the Holy Scripture until the day of judgment. All goodness and prosperity shall be in the house where a copy of this letter shall be found. Finished."

From the hands of the child who found it the letter is said to

have passed into the possession of a convert to the Christian faith. For some reason—possibly because of the persecutions to which Christians were frequently subjected or from fear of ridicule—the convert failed to have the letter published.

He kept it, however, as a sacred memento of Christ, and as such passed it on to his eldest son, who likewise transmitted it, and thus it came down through many generations, but never was published, the tradition being that when it finally was given publicly it had been in this one family for more than a thousand years.

During all this period of time, the story goes, the family suffered repeated and continued misfortunes. Discouraged members had migrated to countries other than in which the person who had gotten the letter from the child had lived—Palestine, evidently—and at last one of them came to America, bringing the fateful letter with him.

Mrs. Fannie Wortman of Marion, Ind., is more or less familiar with the history of the letter since it came to America. The family having possession of it settled in Virginia, still keeping the fact of the letter a secret. It seems that descendants of the Virginia family moved farther south, still followed by misfortune, and finally the last member, a daughter, approached her death bed.

One story is to the effect that with the death of this daughter the entire family which had for so many centuries disregarded the injunction of the letter, and with such dire results, was extinguished. At any rate—and this is Mrs. Wortman's understanding—the daughter on her deathbed called in a neighbor woman by the name of Thompson and turned the letter over to her, relating its history as it had come down through a thousand years or more.

Impressed by the story she had heard from the lips of the dying girl and by the text of the letter, the Thompson woman immediately began an attempt to have it published, and it appeared in the Rome (Ga.) Tribune, October 31, 1891. From there it was reprinted in the Dalton (Ga.) Citizen, and Mrs. Wortman, now living at Marion, Ind., clipped it and retained it in her possession for many years.

Recently Mrs. Wortman had it republished in a Marion paper, stating at the time that during the time she had retained the letter in her possession without having it published or attempting to, she has had a species of bad luck which she attributes to her failure to secure publicity for the letter.

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